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DIARY OF TIBOR GOLDSTEIN

"AND WE STILL LIVE"....

And so it started.....

On May 10th, 1944 I received my draft notice to JÁZBERÉNY. I said good-bye to my parents, unfortunately, for the last time. Then we did not think or imagine the coming atrocities.

My first days in the "Labor Force" were relatively bearable. My battallion commander was quite a decent fellow. He himself did not do his duty eagerly. We were sent to a camp near JÁZBERÉNY, called: PUSZTAMIZSE. We did no work here at all. Most of the guys in our battallion were high-school graduates. They put up a weekly cultural mattinee performance, so we had ~~a~~ nice entertainment; so it started rather well.

Approximately 6 weeks later, we got an order to move on to VÁRPALOTA. We were put into freight trains and off we went. We spent Sukkot in PUSZTAMIZSE, where we had a very nice holiday service.

Next to the rail station there was ^a coal mine. When we ^{saw} comrades, who worked there we got scared; they looked terrible, as their work was harsh: they worked from dawn to late into the night. Half of them were sick. Fortunately, we were assigned to a different job: to build roads in a training area. It was hard labor but we were treated decently. Some propaganda newsreels were filmed there, which were later shown in movie theatres. They dressed some soldiers ~~as~~ well as our "Labor Force" boys in Russian uniforms and showed burning paper tanks.

Naturally, the Hungarian audiences totally accepted these propaganda movies as authentic and factual.

During these days, the American air force "visited" the country daily, causing heavy damages. We watched one of these bombing blitzes, when the Liberators conducted a berrage of bombing of enemy ammunition depots and rendered them totally useless. The next day, a small article appeared in the papers, ~~entitled~~ "No Meaningful Damage Occured".

We were taken out to work there for a few days and encountered many casualties.

One day, after arrival, the boys heard that they want to keep our battallion on the alert, ready to move on. Where? We didn't know. Some said to BOR or to the Polish "front". Of course, this quite depressed us. Our only encouragement was, that by the time we got there, -so we were told- we would become POWs. That was our hope.

Our itinerary...Várpalota, Székesférvár, Budapest, Hatvan, Miskolc, Sátoraljaujhely, Mámarossziget, Körösmező, Nadvorna, Dolobin...

One Friday, we got our final order: to Körösmező. We were transported by freight trains, rather decently, 30 people per wagon and on we went. At Körösmező we were sent on to Stanislo. The trip from Várpalota to Stanislo took 2 days; upon arrival, we received a new order: to Otnia, as Stanislo was being bombarded ^{EVERY} night at 7 pm.

On July 1st we arrived to Otnia. They housed us by ranks in barracks, 12 to a barrack, to Ukranian peasants. The "front" was about 4 km away. Quiet before the storm everywhere. We were to dig trenches. It was not an especially hard work but we were treated coarsely; they were beating us on left and right. We had no complaints about the rations, as they supplied food from German sources...cigarettes, sugar, sardines and other

good staples. One could also get food from the local peasants, like milk, butter, etc, in exchange for clothing and valuables. We were able to engage in personal hygiene. We worked from 6 am till 5 pm; on Saturday till 2 pm. We were at rest on Sunday. One Sunday morning an order came: out to the front. We started to work. Nearly a few minutes into our labor, we heard a long whistle, then an explosion; that was the first time I saw and heard Russian mines explode. Naturally, we got very scared and ran into the cornfields. After a few minutes, mines started exploding. Those were a few undescribably nerve wracking hours. From 7:30am to 1pm without halt. We lay on the muddy ground; our lives were not worth much in those hours; luckily, there were no serious injuries. That afternoon we gathered for a meeting in camp, among great confusion. The Retreat has started. They caught a few men, carrying ammunition; we saved lots of ammunition, which earned us praises.

I ^{was} ~~was~~ given a nasty duty: burrying dead bodies!! ME, who never even saw a dead body!..it was horrible; I also had to aid the wounded and assist in first aid. If I had the courage, I would have become a POW, but I didn't truly want that. Home, only to go home I wanted! Many among us fell prisoners; even if they didn't have the best treatment but they avoided a lot of future sufferings.

The Retreat started. Along the roads, unending rows of carts, cars, tanks and pedestrians; us - "Laborers" were able to advance only in a single files, along the fields. The first day we made 58 km. As soon as we left that village, the Russians were there already. In the meantime, we exploded roads and bridges. We arrived to Bistrice in torn clothes through water almost up to our necks. On the other bank we rested. The next day we continued and arrived to a village: Bohorodjány. All of a sudden they started to explode the roads; I ran into a ditch. All around me a barrage of shots. Suddenly, I noticed that I was very warm. I saw my body bleeding and got scared. A friend, who was nearby immediately saw that I was wounded. He tried to bandage me but I bled so profusely that I lost conscience. They took me to a first aid station and after being treated, was sent back to my group., which was not too far; that's where the battle stopped.

They came only to the Carpathian Mountains. Our chief officer deserted and that's when trouble started. Conditions were terrible in the Carpathians. Of course, all supply stopped during the Retreat; thus, for the next 10 days the only staples we had, was whatever remnants and vegetation we were able to find in the fields. They brought us almost to the Hungarian border: to Taracköz; there, after they took us about 20 km into the Carpathians, we had to build roads for the retreating forces, in places where no man has never even walked before. The only thing the eye could see was tall pines and more pines. Could not even see the sky, only dense trees. It was September; we almost froze. During our long marches, half the battalion's shoes were completely worn out and most of us had to walk barefeet on those rough, rocky mountains. Our feet looked terrible. We lived in makeshift huts, made of tree branches. It was pouring rain day and night. We were drenched; we had no time to wash, even to eat we only had a few minutes. We lay down in our wet clothes. INside the hut it was wetter and muddier that outside. This is where we got infested with lice. We couldn't treat ourselves at all. We had to work; no one would be allowed to be sick; people collapsed at the workplace. A lower ranking soldier was in charge of us, who treated us brutally.

Thereafter, we were assinged a new supervisor with 2 assistants (who couldn't even spell their names...), who pushed us along with gun

butts and sticks, while we had to lift gigantic rocks, without a minute's halt. Whenever one needed to take care of "mother nature", he got 30 lashes on his naked body. It was a good "entertainment" for these guards. Later on these men were removed from us but by then, half of our regiment were no longer "humans" any more... we had rags on our bodies etc.

We spent almost 2 months in the Carpathian Mountains.

Rosh Hashana arrived; after long pleading, we got permission for a religious service after work. We gathered in an open field and prayed. I never saw or experienced a more touching service in my life. Naturally, no one had any information about our parents or families. I did the reading for the group; there was a young Rabbinical student among us, who gave a moving speech, to encourage and console us. On Yom Kippur we worked all day but fasted. At the end of Sukkot, another retreat started: we destroyed ammunition storages and roads, where lot of our blood was lost.

Then came the long awaited moment, into the Country (Hungary). The first village by the border we arrived to = Németsák. We were all starved. We moved in hordes toward the end of the village, where we saw soldiers eating potatoes. we approached them to beg. A few of them took pity on us and threw a few pieces of roasted potatoes toward us. We were like wild animals, "killing" each other for them. We were housed and received some bread. As soon as it was received, it was gone. Later, we found some potatoes in a cellar, which we gobbled up, subsequently, half the regiment got sick! We managed to recuperate, somehow. There was no work here but plenty of food.

On October 14th there were some rumors of peace! That evening we listened to Horthy's speech; we rejoiced and everyone prepared to go home. We started marching happily. Only on the 17th did we learn of Szálasi becoming the head of State!

At this time, they directed us toward Sátoraljaujhely (where I was born). It took us 12 days from Taracköz to S.ujhely, marching daily 30-35 km. myself, as my poor comrades, barefeet. If anyone legged behind somewhat, he got beat; we couldn't even stop to urinate on the road. For food we received only 300 gram bread and 60 gram jam. When we arrived to Királyhelme, I totally lost my strength and decided to stay behind, in some way. They kicked me all over and left me on the road. I pretended to have fainted. I thought and hoped, that somehow, I'll survive to wait for the Russians. Thus, I arrived to Szomotor, where I spent lot of time as a child. I was very saddened and disheartened. I knew nothing about home. I proceeded to my grandfather's grave, where I burst into tears. Then started toward my poor uncle's house. Entered the yard. I can't even describe my feelings that moment! In past years the yard was noisy, full of childrens' voices. NOW - silence surrounded me; even the dog looked at me in a strange way, although I used to play with him a lot as a child. I went inside, to look for the carriage-driver (who was an employee of the family), but I found only his daughter. She looked at me and asked - "who are you looking for?" - I said - "don't you recognize me?"..told her who I was, but even then, she blocked the door in front of me, never even dawned on her to offer me anything; I had to ask for some leftover food. Finally, I received some milk and bread. I saw that it's futile to even try to stay here, so I started toward S.Ujhely.

I caught up with my regiment in Borsi, but again, I stayed behind. There, everyone took pity on me, as they knew who I was. Here, too, I went looking for my aunt's house, but again, found only an empty house. Went back to S.Ujhely but was caught on the way by the police, who threatened to shoot me.

They managed to assemble 350 people and with a heavy escort directed us toward Gónc. On the way, I again stayed behind (at Pálház); at that point, I didn't care anymore, whatever happens, happens. I arrived at Nagybozsvar very tired and hungry. My feet were wounded and thus, I could only drag myself. I was a totally neglected SORRY sight!! Then I was called into a house, where they gave me some food. They questioned me; I showed them a picture of my former civilian life and they took pity on me. They decided to try to help me in some way. They sent me to a castle on the hillside, where people were kind to me. There I took a bath; they gave me clean underwear, pants and even a pair of boots. I can't even describe the wonderful feeling to have been treated as a human being again! I stayed there for 12 days, waiting with trepidation for the Russians to arrive. Unfortunately, they were delayed. My hosts were afraid to keep me any longer, so I had to leave. In any case, I felt somewhat rejuvenated and took to the road easier. The Russians were at this time near the border, vicinity of S.Ujhely and the retreat was going on full force. Along the roads, scattered groups of people from the Work Brigade were marching. I joined one of them, toward Gónc, where there was a Distribution Center. From there, they sent us to another camp, near Kassa (Kosice), called Kaksabaksa, unit V/3 (death regiment).

We had to dig ditches. Conditions were horrible. The Schwabs were beating our guys. Half of them had ~~no~~ shoes, thus they had to march barefeet (in November & December)! For the minutest trespassing of their rules, flagging was the order of day. From here, we were taken to Füzer, Füzérkomlot, Füzérkonya and at last to Gibort, where we also did ditch work; we still kept hoping that all this misery would end soon. The Russians were quite close to us now; we could hear the shots quite clearly.

One day an order came: to Kassa. On the way, we saw hordes of Work Brigade comrades pouring in toward the same direction; it turned out, we were all directed to be concentrated in Kassa, and from there to Germany. They took us to a brick factory, where we were no longer considered Work Brigade, only JEWS!!

It started snowing; we lay on the naked ground, under the open sky. The camp guards watched our every move. There was terrible famine. Our previous supervisors no longer provided for us and no one else took care of us. Later on, we received some food. Later, we were transferred to a tent camp; they shoved us into crowded stables, where the air was unbearably stifling, we were covered with lice.

Kassa was attacked and fired on daily. The Russians were very close. We didn't believe that we could be taken out of here, but that sad day arrived.

We were taken to the rail station: 3200 men were shoved and crowded into tightly packed 40 cattle rail cars, average 80-90 bodies per car. Of course, without any sort of food or supplies. We were loaded at night but the train didn't start moving until before noon the next day.

Inside the wagon conditions were horrible: we couldn't even move, unbearable heat and stench; there were some sick among us, with gastrointestinal disease. We could only urinate and defecate inside the wagon!! On the 4th day, at some Slovak station, they opened the doors for the first time, along a small brook. The hordes attacked the water; then we received a little "bean soup" (warm water...) This is the way we carried on for the next 12 days. On the border, the Germans took over. Surprisingly, they treated us somewhat better, gave us bread and pea soup. They took a headcount of the transport. We removed the dead from the wagons. On following stations, they slowly removed additional people. At long last, we disembarked at DeutschKreutz and from there at a village called Hidegség, near Nagycékn. Here we were assigned to barracks; ours had 24 people. We were terribly scared as we were surrounded by ss guards. Our work here was constructing tank traps. There were a total of 1700 men here. At first we were fed twice daily: black "coffee" (?) in the morning, some bean/carrot concoction in the evening. 1 kg. bread for 3 people, which was divided along lots of arguments and fights. Regular food was attainable only in exchange for value items, for example: for a good watch: 2 kg bread, lard or bacon; for a nice gold pinky ring: 3 kg. bread etc.

At the end of January Typhus broke out. People were dropping dead daily like flies, 25-30 by the day. Never-the-less, we had to go to work. People collapsed and died on the work place. Some were killed, shot on the spot for going to the toilet without permission. Beating and flagellating were on daily agenda. They came into the barracks and shot blindly all over.

In February I, too, caught Typhus but was able to conquer it quickly. I had temperature for a week, but then got over it. Naturally, I was very weak, thus was able to escape the big exodus.

We heard very bad news from home, which saddened us, but I kept hoping even encouraging the boys to hold on...it can't last very long now!

On March 28th, the boys came back; there was retreat on the roads. At 8 pm curfew was ordered. The weak ones were taken out of line, they were told they would follow the next day. We returned to the barracks. We knew that only death awaited us and their promises to follow the group the next day were empty promises.

It was the first night of Seder. The boys were gone. The next morning 2 Arrow-Cross and one German gave us a wake-up call. We were prepared for death. They assembled us all in one of the barracks. It was terrible to watch the poor fellows, with frozen feet, who were able only to crawl on their knees. Later, a German officer came, called out to the eldest among us to do a head count. After that each of us received 2 slices of bread, $\frac{1}{4}$ kg. butter, 50 gram honey and some squkraut, we got the answer about this in the evening. After this they took the ailing ones to another barrack.

Late that evening, 2 "gangster" Arrow-Cross came in and asked for the headcount. They were told 68; they started to fire blindly and asked again: "Is it still 68?" they fired about 15 shots. Unfortunately, 3 men died and 8 got wounded. The next day, the barrack commandant went out to report the incident but was shot on the way!

25% COTTON FIBRE

New SS troupes came through the village. They chased everybody to an open area - to be shot. These were horrifying moments!! We awaited death. To our luck--an order came, in the meantime: back to the barracks. WE WERE SAVED!

The front was very near. On Saturday, it was very still. No one visible on the street; shots were heard nearby. We were all excited. One of the boys among us took the courage to go out to the street. He ran back jubilant, yelling: "WE ARE LIBERATED"!!

The Russian troops arrived. They took pity on us and provided us with lots of good staples.

As soon as I was liberated, I took to the road again. The next day I arrived to a prisoners camp, where we were treated in a decent way but without having the freedom of movement outside, but were fed and taken care of.

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